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## A Geography of Reading in 'Paris, Port-de-Mer'

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## A Geography of Reading in 'Paris, Port-de-Mer'

### Abstract

«Paris, Port-de-Mer» is chosen purposely for its apparent lack of focus as an example of the difficulty of reading the author's later work. The way into the text is made twice, once via the presumed topic of Paris as a seaport, once with the help of Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*, which supplies the terms for various metaphors operating in the narrative. The topic quickly goes underground, only to emerge after it is understood that the many books and libraries are to be treated somewhat like the port, places of arrival and departure, but not of permanence. The text is similarly a port, or «trace», as Cendrars calls it. The narrative is an inventory of books, but at the same time a departure from them. The «most beautiful library of the world,» though never explicitly named as such, is no doubt the bookstalls on the quais, and the narrator as reader is, at his best, peripatetic.

### Keywords

Blaise Cendrars, Paris Port de Mer, geography, René Descartes

## A GEOGRAPHY OF READING IN «PARIS, PORT-DE-MER.»

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Soon after the fall of France in 1940 Cendrars retired to Aix-en-Provence. He wrote absolutely nothing for three years until, in August of 1943, he suddenly «took fire» and launched into *L'Homme foudroyé*. This is the first of four long, vaguely autobiographical narratives which though some consider to be his most accomplished work, most readers find disorganized and confused, rambling and digressive. It is not a simple matter to dispose of such criticism, for it contains much truth; one could, nevertheless, speak of Cendrars's art of digression and, of course, of his deconstruction. Clearly, in these narratives Cendrars is dismissing certain conventional habits of ordering, but the texts do not primarily convey the sense of avoidance, delay or demolition, of an attack on ordered discourse; instead, their humor, vitality and sweep point to an embracing of people and places, albeit in a seemingly indiscriminate and haphazard fashion.

«Paris, Port-de-Mer,» the last narrative in *Bourlinguer*, is an exemplary case in which to examine this lack of focus we have come to expect from the later Cendrars.<sup>(1)</sup> There is indeed focus, but Cendrars appears to be constantly abandoning his own topics. Still, it is with these decoys that the reader must start, and we should not be too quick to skirt the impression of disorder and incertitude which the reader is obviously expected to submit to, for it prepares a special ground. To follow Cendrars's text a certain distance is to apprehend the directionless material not as digression, a secession from straightforward narrative, but as free association, a dynamic improvisation taking pleasure and place entirely in the present. Like the therapeutic, this free association

is not meaningless, but its coherence is almost secret; all enunciation, including rational discourse, appears as decoy until the dissimulated pattern emerges, at which point all the decoys turn out to be pertinent. From this only relatively free associating there appear two entrances into the text, a place and a book which, for this reader, discreetly separate from the other decoys. Quite probably another reader could be more sensitive to some other decoy as entrance, and yet come to a similar conclusion.

The title of this narrative contains two entities, a city and one of its possible functions. Paris is ever present in the text, but it is not always easy to say as much for the port. The very first words of the text dismiss the port, comparing it to a sea serpent. But the more secure locus of Paris also plays, in Cendrars's work as a whole, a similar game of hide and seek. The following works have nothing to do with Paris yet all end there, within only a very few lines of their closing, as if the name of the city were a signature, or even a talisman: *Le Transsibérien* and *Le Panama* (both end in Paris cafés); *Moravagine* (Conrad Moricand drawing at the *Rotonde*); *Dan Yack*; *L'Homme foudroyé* (at the *Criterion* café); *La Main coupée* (Paris appears as the last word in the book); *Le Lotissement du ciel* (with a post-script in Paris). One might go into greater detail and see that this principle of the ever present yet absent Paris is even more general: works manifestly taking place in Paris can have misleading titles like *La Guerre au Luxembourg*, or titles of total dispersal like *Emmène-moi au bout du monde!*.... If Cendrars's career as a novelist were to be considered, for a moment, as if it were itself a book, we could see *Emmène-moi* as the Parisian signature at the end of his fictionalized life.

Within *Bourlinguer* we can see that the two major texts, «Gênes» and «Paris, Port-de-Mer» (over 300 pages out of a total of 500 for eleven separate narratives), illustrate this «Paris-principle» in that «Gênes,» which is really about Naples, ends on the note of Paris, the city of Rastignac's famous «A nous deux maintenant!» and «Paris, Port-de-Mer» is, of course, the last narrative in the volume. The ending of «Gênes» is particularly revealing when Cendrars suggests a book to be written: «What a book remains to be written on all those unknown young people who come to conquer Paris» (pp. 298-9). The city remains a dream --even as a book, a place desired but never satisfactorily attained, never gained: «Main line station, warehouse of hopes.»(2) In

announcement, and then it is quickly removed from the foreground as if it were preferable to maintain it as a place always to be imagined.

Actually, «Paris, Port-de-Mer» presents a rather surprising unity of locale for such as Cendrars. Granted, most of sections seven through ten do not take place in Paris; but the other eighty pages do, out of a total of 125 in the Folio paperback, and while sections one and twelve wander about the city and its outskirts, sections two, three, four, five, six, eleven and, actually part of seven keep us within a very small circle, within a radius of perhaps a ten-minute walk from the Quai du Louvre. The Louvre and the bookstalls on the Quai Malaquais confront each other from either side of the escaping river in a diminutive map of all the important concerns of the narrative. All the major personalities appear in this magic circle: Cendrars himself, Remy de Gourmont, Ch. Chadénat, Paulo Prado, as well as lesser participants who make significant appearances, t'Serstevens and Reverdy for example. Yet this very precise locale is often lost to the reader, and we may gather an idea of how this is done by following the text for only a short distance.

First, of course, we have a title, then a subtitle (the disposition is different in the *Oeuvres complètes*, but similar in Denoël's original edition of 1948 and in the Folio edition); these already present us with a contradiction, or so it seems, as neither the so-called port nor the city of the title is the «Most Beautiful Library in the World» of the subtitle; this could turn out to be, later, the bookstalls or Chadénat's library, but nothing points to either yet. The next thing we read is an epigraph which praises the library of a man in Geneva, and so again we are led away from making connections with the port. Still, the experienced reader of Cendrars finds something to latch onto here, the librarian praised as he is for his relation to life, to action. Guns and books --as much as to speak of action and contemplation-- nestle together comfortably in the same collection. Also, by now we have two libraries.

We will return to books and libraries but first let us continue to follow the track, so to speak, of the port. «Like the sea serpent, Paris the seaport is another one of those topics....» This is the beginning of our text, a non-topic, space-filler for a newspaper in August, when Parisians have nothing to read about. As this article is not written, the port does not even attain the status of print; it

remains an unwritten fiction. Then Cendrars describes for us how it also fails to become a film. But as the port recedes from its announced position as main topic, other things take its place. We have in its stead a number of inventories, short encyclopedias, really, of the efforts and the desires involved in the port: all the materials accumulating and rotting in vacant lots, the bureaucracies and labyrinthine halls of the Public Works Ministry and other organizations seeking power or profit, the itinerant population of the sites, the discussions about the movie. So, in section one, the disappearance of the port makes little difference to the text which has built a number of real worlds that branch out of the potential yet unrealized one of a port, and we might generalize that Cendrars prefers to have a non-existent topic, an empty if labeled container which he always fills with something else.

However, section two immediately announces the port; Cendrars has decided to return it to our fictional reality, and some fellows disembark directly from London. If the magician is credited with saying, «Now you see it, now you don't» Cendrars adds, as is obligatory for any magician, «Now you see it again.» The subject of Paris as a seaport is reaffirmed, so that we expect it must be dealt with in some manner. At the same time, however, this is almost the last appearance of the port in the text (it is prominent only 100 pages later, in a quotation from Balzac, p. 497); so the reader is left dangling, unless he can make his own connections with something else in the account. Cendrars and his friend from England move off the quai into a bistro which is the most thoroughly elaborated so far of his little encyclopedias, a cache of fruit bottled in liqueurs amusingly located on the rue de l'Arbre-Sec.

Section three opens on the quais among the bookstalls, overlooking a small steamer loading liqueurs for England, and pianos for China. Though the time is quite unrelated to that of the previous two sections, associations are coming together on the quais; while the topic of the port recedes, a transition to the topic of the subtitle and epigraph has been effected. The reader of «Paris, Port-de-Mer» does not have to finish the narrative to know that it is largely about books. It is in fact Cendrars's equivalent of Montaigne's essay «Of Books,» especially in that it is not so much about certain books as it about reading itself and one's relation to books. The epigraph to the whole of *Bourlinguer*, presumably a volume about travel, is from Montaigne's essay «Of the Affection

of Fathers for their Children»; it is about writing a book about oneself, and thus presents a problematical relationship to the title word *boulinguer* just above it. This unresolved relationship of travel title to book epigraph is repeated in the case of «Paris Port-de-Mer,» so it would appear Cendrars has purposely planned the difficult juxtaposition.

A conservative count of books, authors and libraries mentioned in «Paris, Port-de-Mer» is 130, so it will not seem unnatural to use a book as the second entrance into this elusive text. Descartes' *Discours de la méthode* may seem an odd choice since the narrative mentions many authors whom we know to have greatly influenced Cendrars: de Gourmont, Balzac, Saint-Simon, Apollinaire. Curiously the *Discours* receives more attention than almost any other book, and in the end it sheds the most direct light of any book in this book-studded text upon the seaport which, for the moment, we have lost.

The *Discours* is interesting both as a text alluded to by direct quotation and as a complete essay implicitly reinterpreted by Cendrars. It appears first about the middle of «Paris, Port-de-Mer,» in a purposely confusing opening to section eight. Prado, sitting on his veranda in the stifling Brazilian heat, refers to a text beginning «I was at the time in Germany . . . ,» to which Cendrars responds, «How could one not think of him,» meaning, it turns out, not Descartes (who has not been mentioned anyway), but Chadenat. The connection which Cendrars and Prado are credited with making so fast, and which is thus the subject of this passage, is the stove, or «poêle,» which both Chadenat and Descartes sat «in,» as the *Discours* has it. Cendrars describes this as «all in all, hothouse culture» (p. 443). The subject of the stove is twice foreshadowed on the preceding page, in the smoking chimney fire in Aix and the furnace Freddy Sauser stoked in Peking in 1904.

Next, a servant is sent after the book so Prado and Cendrars may check the quotation while, in a rather shocking counterpoint, Cendrars's dog Sandy is dying. The servant returns with the Leyde 1637 edition (the original edition) and the dog expires in the same short sentence, in an either forced or satirical juxtaposition of life and death and «hothouse culture.» A few pages later Descartes's leaking stove returns as an explanation of the philosopher's interest in optics; here the foreshadowing of page 442 re-emerges because of the connection with smoke and stinging eyes.

The train of thought is then lost to the author as he falls asleep



joking about a «stroke of illumination» and the illusion of great lucidity before falling asleep.(3)

Two pages farther on Prado quotes *Le Discours* as follows: «When one spends too much time travelling one finally becomes a stranger to one's own land. . . .» He wants to know if Cendrars does not sense the danger of this (p. 450). At this juncture I would like to take a closer look at Descartes's own text. It will become clear that Cendrars himself had taken a new or renewed interest in *La Méthode* during the writing of *L'Homme foudroyé* and *Bourlinguer*. This quotation about travelling away from home is from Part One. What is extremely interesting for «Paris, Port-de-Mer» is that Prado--as Cendrars's spokesman, of course--has drastically changed the context of the original, where Descartes is not talking about travel at all but about reading! Books are described as conversations with the past, and returning «to one's own land» means to stop reading and return to the world of the present.(4) Later in «Paris, Port-de-Mer» Cendrars revives this image of Descartes (without mentioning him); first he changes the terms and speaks of real travel as a moving in time, finding oneself for example «at the end of some trail in the desert stranded in the Middle Ages» (p. 479). Then on the next page Cendrars reverts to Descartes's own idea by describing reading as the same sort of travel in time, with different sorts of dangers, particularly that of removing the reader from the real, open world and later returning him to it as an alien, even a cripple; this would be, then, the danger Cendrars is warning us of through the use of Descartes (p. 480).

«Paris, Port-de-Mer» and the early parts of the *Discours* as used by Cendrars thus seem to share an interesting ambiguity in the authors' attitudes towards life and books. These are made antithetical, yet meshed in metaphors with permuted, almost exchangeable terms: book, time, travel, present. Books are, further, smoke and light, confusion and error, or enlightenment and lucidity. Also, the book and the voyage are both dangerous.

A reading of Part One of *Le Discours* shows that such vacillation is not Cendrars's doing. At first Descartes is sceptical of the very text he is writing, a discourse on method. It is announced as perfectly subjective, and he would prefer to call it «a story,» or even «a fable.»(5) The epigraph from Montaigne that Cendrars has used for *Bourlinguer* betrays the same uneasiness. In the next few pages Descartes recounts reading a great deal, «age-old



books, and . . . their stories, and . . . their fables,»(6) and then, as Cendrars has quoted him, he returns to the present, «one's own land.» A few pages later the terms of the metaphor of travel are reversed and, having decided finally against the stories and fables of others, Descartes devotes himself to real travel, termed «in the great book of the world.» Here we stumble across the epigraph to *L'Homme foudroyé*, written three years earlier:

Forming the resolve to look for no other science, than one that could be found in myself, or else in the great book of the world, I devoted the rest of my youth to travelling, observing courts and armies, keeping the company of people of various tempers and conditions, recording diverse experiences, to proving myself in the encounters fortune provided, and in all cases to reflecting upon whatever occurred so that I might draw some profit from it.(7)

Part two of *Le Discours* then opens with Descartes «alone in a stove, where I had ample leisure to muse upon my thoughts.»(8) He has retreated from travelling and books both, in order to look inside himself as he plans it at the outset of the quotation above (however this is in a passage Cendrars has omitted from the epigraph to *L'Homme foudroyé*).

We find Descartes has been caught up in two dichotomies: one of influence--books versus the outside world of the present; one of personal commitment--action versus contemplation. Cendrars's interpretation is not a great distortion, and in fact it re-establishes a strong sense of personal groping in a text which is a cultural emblem of confident, methodological clarity. Essential for Cendrars is the two-way metaphor of books as voyage and the ambiguity of books as either smoke or light. These equivalences are brought to bear in an essay on uses and users of books in which the idea of the stability and immortality of books is jettisoned, and along with it the desire for a permanent library.

We soon realize that in «Paris, Port-de-Mer» Cendrars is constantly leaving books and authors: in sections three he slavishly follows Remy de Gourmont on the quais, but once admitted to his apartment and study he has to bolt; he leaves Reverdy with his «gouffre,» or abyss, in the middle of a conversation, shortly after they had both left the Bibliothèque Nationale; he distributes his own books throughout Brazil and the novels he receives from the

NRF to two women who work in the metro; he abandons his «masters,» as he calls them, Balzac and Saint-Simon. Also, he mentions the loss of his own library on three separate occasions in the text, and he burns books at least twice, making no doubt light and smoke together.(9) Others are described as bereft of their libraries despite themselves: t'Serstevens on a tropical island pining for his bookshelves, or Chadenat, whose library will die with him because his sons show no interest (both earn their living in the wine business, and we are reminded that Cendrars usually goes into a bistro when he flees writers). Books become so oppressive it seems to Cendrars that «the turning planet was nothing but a rotary printing-press» (p. 479). So, as with Paris itself, the physical presence in the text of books and readers is constantly being fled.

The key is that books, and Paris, can serve a double function, a paradoxical one, as the imagery borrowed from Descartes implies. The anecdote with Reverdy provides an early example in the narrative (pp. 403-4), for though his little book *La Lucarne ovale* brings light, when it takes its place next to other creators of light in the Bibliothèque Nationale all the light is blocked. obviously the library, the very sense of a library, can betray the book, even though it may seem impossible not to have many books. As we near the end of «Paris, Port-de-Mer,» in section eleven, the writers who had been shunned earlier return, accompanied by others, and they are all considered remarkable in their addiction:

. . . what I admire the most in the untiring reader is not his erudition or his determination, his diligent patience or the deprivations he willingly suffers, but above all his capacity for illusion. . . .(10)

The sense of contradiction within the man-in-his-library is well-sustained here because the readers are not admired for sacrificing other things to reading; they are admired for a debility intrinsic to reading. Cendrars is fascinated by these obsessed readers, including himself at different periods in his life. He analyses the nature of the quest for the three major characters: Chadenat, «a pure reader, who read for the sake of reading,» nevertheless feeding an insatiable anglophobia; de Gourmont, who read «to create a void, not around him but inside him»; Prado, who read «to endow his little Paulist homeland with its titles of nobility.»(11)

The first two readers are unable to function outside of their libraries. Prado holds a transitional position, as does t'Serstevens; being a balanced man he reads for light, «to take greater pleasure in life, the senses and the mind,» but he, like the others, cannot go long without his library, «cannot live for long separated from it.»(12)

Cendrars, on the other hand, in the very next sentence points out that he has no library (as we have said, he has lost it three times in this narrative), yet he still has the vice: «that is why . . . I prowl the world, dropping in unannounced on friends . . . to devour their library in a frenzy. . . .»(13) This persona has shed his library and reaches for a different balance in relation to books, always searching through them for the light at the end of the shelves, as it were. He is Apollinaire's «Errant des bibliothèques,» or library wanderer, as he reveals to Louise Faure-Favier on page 483, and no longer the *rat* or *nègre* of libraries as he had been at La Mazarine working for the famous «impresario of the avant-garde.»(14) Apollinaire read his own columns with such intensity that he didn't know he was shot until the blood dripped over the page. Cendrars, for his part, had burned the same journal, *Le Mercure de France*, for warmth, that other light. As he points out when he speaks of the artists who demand the burning of the Louvre, they just want a place which will make room for themselves; he would only approve of a «feu de joie,» a glad fire which would signal liberation. Cendrars refuses to be held to one subject, one place, but through a detachment which he demands of himself, he is rather a map of subjects, of libraries and inventories or encyclopedias. Paris and libraries are places, immovable and thus, in their manner, obsessive, out of balance because they are turned in upon themselves; Cendrars prefers to take his books as transitions. Thus «the most beautiful library of the world» is not really Chadenat's, which is the most elaborately discussed library in the narrative but is only *about* travel. The beautiful library is the bookstalls on the quais (de Gourmont is credited with saying so on page 405), an unstable library, always changing and indiscriminate, like the river and Paris as a seaport, a place of departures and arrivals. The best books, and authors, are those not bound to other books and others. Cendrars the reader wants them to come from, and open back upon worlds outside of themselves; he wants constant and unending interplay between the terms of Descartes's metaphor, «the great book of the world.»

Thus the only writer Cendrars does not flee is the Provençal poet François Jouve, a baker who makes a special loaf for the wanderer and recites poetry for him as he works in his oven room, quite a different sort of stove (pp. 400-1). And one unusual book which stands out, climaxing all of chapter ten, is a militant Bolivian atlas which has erased from its maps Britain and all her possessions. Possession is deemed obsession.

For Cendrars the book is a mapping of a mind in action, and thus it captures it only for a moment, the more lightly the better. As the volume recedes into the past of the reader, writing becoming the written, it quickly jells, solidifies and becomes one point on another map, the one being charted by the wanderer, the *errant*.

Cendrars's word to describe the written is «*trace*,» taken mainly, though not exclusively, in the sense of barely visible tracks. This is in a passage where he questions the writer's ability, his own, to create an object with sense and permanence:

Life is not logic, the art of portraiture not perspective, the writer's creation not a good likeness. [. . .] We will never know any other traces of life --the life of the planet or of the individual-- than those which pierce through to consciousness as traces of writing. Minute scrawls.(15)

The book is a powerful seduction because it establishes sense and permanence, one kind of light; it is our only communicable trace. Yet it must be resisted because it is immediately a falsification of yet lighter, more exhilarating and, ultimately more real traces, the experience of the real things themselves. This is the contradiction so acutely felt, in «Paris, Port-de-Mer,» of attraction to and flight from writers, readers, books, libraries, Paris; each of those many objects, people, places is no more than one trace in a text which is constantly leaving traces in the process of pursuing their associations with others. So while each library seems condemned by Cendrars, all libraries are vitalized by a charting which admits them as traces. While he flees any given one he reaches out for all of them together, travelling between them and in and out of them; this reader is the river.

Paris, or «Paris, Port-de-Mer,» is a map of contrasting libraries, de Gourmont's on the rue des Saints-Pères, Chadenat's at 17 Quai des Grands-Augustins, that of t'Serstevens on the Ile

St-Louis, the Mazarine and the Bibliothèque Nationale (and we might add those, lurking in the background, of Apollinaire at 202 boulevard St-Germain and of Cendrars himself on the rue de Savoie). It is also a map of bars, living rooms, trading voyages, etc., all rendered in encyclopedic detail, as if to reach further and further into the core and diversity of every object were crucial; even a feather constitutes a small encyclopedia, on pages 462-3. The single-minded focus is withdrawn from each of these objects, people, places; each is first magnified, inventoried, then quickly contracted to a point, and the mapping of these points is the most faithful record of experience as Cendrars is portraying it. Thus Paris, though it is not more than a signature, gains special prominence by virtue of being the background in a picture with unstable subjects in the foreground. Appropriately, as we approach the end of the narrative we find collectors loosing their close, physical grip on their belongings in exchange for another, more distant relation, like Chadenat and his «*membrane*» which connects him to all his books (p. 490). At the same time books themselves, the congealing traces, recede, to be replaced by other sorts of traces: Cendrars's last library is a portable one, made up of pages torn from books, and when he gives up even that one he discovers what he calls «*chastity*» (p. 481); Vollard the art collector is connected by a «*membrane*» to all his paintings, and he can «*feel*» when one is missing (p. 491); the lawyer of Murillo street collects dictaphone rolls, which is to say only voices now (p. 493); Apollinaire's equivalent of the membrane is his phenomenal memory, with which he memorized books without really reading them!» (p. 492) The narrative winds down towards music and finally silence, or at least listening, where the last word is «*word*» presented in a statement of its denial: «I won't say a word.» (16)

So the narrative is conceived as a lightly-drawn map of fading tracings, or a very personal atlas of the attempts of others to make permanence out of the confusion of original traces. Books and authors would like to be fixed and stable, and their attempts both repel and fascinate Cendrars. Yet they become as stable as they ever will be in Cendrars's view, reaching their greatest import and weight only in relation to Cendrars moving past them. For his part, Cendrars free-associates; he reads in different places. The voyager can trace the map because he is not trying to possess one place; finally, he may not even be trying to cut out a literary space for himself and his persona: «I don't matter. Nor do my books mat-

ter,» he says, and again: «I don't matter, I pass and fit anywhere, a *calender* as Gobineau had it.»(17) A *calender* is a wandering beggar dervish, and this reminds us of the *errant*. By this relinquishing of possession or claim to any one place the wanderer of libraries can be their geographer, literally the writer or tracer of the earth. By virtue of not being *there*, in illusory fixity, he can see where they all are, as «*contrastes simultanés*.»

The free association technique of the text practices this refusal to be bound, and if we may consider that most all books are bound, by their obsessions and their forms, this one has made a guiding principle, or its unity, out of a consistent refusal to grant too much importance to any one book.

One might term this a deconstruction.(18) But Cendrars hints at a better term. We may speak of «Paris, Port-de-Mer» as a «light» text, in two senses: first, it sheds light on all it touches but, secondly, it does not give any of these things weight, nor do all of these together accede to a centralized, unified structure which would impart weight, or a heavy meaning. This is a literature of travelling lightly, for one must always be ready to travel, though it betrays a great fondness for all the baggage --literary and other-- which one has willingly left behind; one is glad to miss it. The subject of the book then turns out indeed to be the one announced, vivified by denials which are unable to erase the traces of the topic moving through them. The text is that one walk along the quai which it portrays at its most superficial level. This walk can never be precisely repeated, nor sufficiently described directly, nor given such weight as to make it appear a symbolic or universalized walk there. This is a mimetic text in a way, yet not exactly transparent, conceding a concrete reality behind it; it is light mimetic, entirely devoted to the trace of bright experience in one light-footed walk. The most beautiful library cannot be pinned down, and that is why it is beautiful.

If this does not contradict the image of Cendrars as a voyager --whether of the imagination or of the world-- still it renders the image somewhat less inconsequential. We have discussed flight in order to replace it with movement, a moving about in which both subject and object are mapped by each other, though mapped as no more than traces. It is as if the text and what it represents were eyeing each other in continual and interdependent re-definition. Such an understanding of the narrative obliges us to abandon the view of Cendrars as a poet of «la possession du



monde.» We could perhaps say the contrary, that Cendrars was possessed by the world, but we still have to be careful not to violate the sense of «trace» with any hard and fast ownership. Cendrars's imagination hardly belongs, for example, to Paris or to Remy de Gourmont, for as often as he signs their names he gives them no more than that privileged trace of his respect. The poet-calender does beg in the market-place, yet he easily maintains his independence, and the almsgiver, though giver of one sort of life, never buys his visions. The wanderer tells his fables for nothing that can match them; thus he cannot be bought. In similar manner, his writing, in «Paris, Port-de-Mer» noticeably, does not wish to dictate a fixed syllabus but rather to leave the trace of a semi-mythical port for any interested departing or arriving imagination.

## NOTES

1. *Bourlinguer*, originally published in 1948 by Denoël, Paris; subsequently in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 6 (Denoël, 1961). For the reader's convenience I am using the more readily available Folio paperback (Denoël, 1974); further references to this edition will be given in the body of the text. Translations throughout the paper are my own unless otherwise noted.

2. «Gare centrale débarcadère des volontés carrefour des inquiétudes,» *Le Transsibérien*, OC, 1 (Paris: Denoël, 1963), p. 32. From the translation by the poet Anselm Hollo in *Evergreen Review Reader*, ed. Barney Rosset (New York: Grove, 1968), p. 629.

3. «... congestion de lumière, comme dit Balzac . . . ,» *Bourlinguer*, p. 448.

4. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, in *Oeuvres philosophiques*, ed. Ferdinand Alquié, vol. 1 (Paris: Garnier, 1963), pp. 573-4.

5. «une histoire,» «une fable,» Descartes, p. 571.

6. «des livres anciens, et . . . leurs histoires, et . . . leurs fables,» Descartes, p. 573.

7. Descartes' text runs as follows:

Et me résolvant de ne chercher plus d'autre science, que celle qui se pourrait trouver en moi-même, ou bien dans le grand livre du monde, j'employai le reste de ma jeunesse à voyager, à voir des cours et des armées, à fréquenter des gens de diverses humeurs et conditions, à recueillir diverses expériences, à m'éprouver moi-même dans les rencontres que la fortune me proposait,



et partout à faire telle réflexion sur les choses qui se présentaient, que j'en pusse tirer quelque profit (p. 577).

Cendrars' epigraph to *L'Homme foudroyé*, OC, 5 (Denoël, 1960), p. 45 reads:

«... le grand livre du monde...: Voyager, voir des cours et des armées, fréquenter des gens de diverses humeurs et conditions, recueillir diverses expériences, s'éprouver soi-même dans la fortune...»

8. «seule dans un poêle, où j'avais tout loisir de m'entretenir de mes pensées.» Descartes, p. 579.

9. On p. 395 young Sauser burns a complete set of the *Mercure de France*; on pp. 461-6 Cendrars burns damaged prayer books at Mme. Errazuriz' home in Biarritz. Some other book burnings in the text are those of the library at Louvain (twice!) and de Gourmont's *Physique de l'amour* at a British University.

10. «... ce que j'admire le plus chez les lecteurs assidus, ce n'est pas leur science ni leur constance, leur longue patience ni les privations qu'ils s'imposent, mais leur faculté d'illusion . . . » (p. 479).

11. «lecteur pur qui lisait pour lire,» «pour faire le vide, non pas autour de soi, mais en soi,» «dans le but de doter sa petite patrie pauliste de ses titres de noblesse» (pp. 481-2).

12. «mieux jouir de la vie, des sens et de l'esprit,» «ne peut vivre longtemps séparé d'elle» (p. 482).

13. «c'est pourquoi . . . je rôde de par le monde, tombant d'improviste chez des amis . . . pour dévorer leur bibliothèque avec frénésie . . . » (p. 482).

14. Apollinaire's «Errant des bibliothèques» exhibits many similarities with our text, and his *Le Flâneur des deux rives*, edited by Cendrars in 1918 (see Cendrars's note «pour le Lecteur inconnu» no. 16, p. 501) could also have provided an entrance to «Paris, Port-de-Mer.» One chapter deals with an eccentric book dealer, another with the art dealer Ambroise Vollard. Within «Les quais et les bibliothèques,» the chapter which harbors the *errant*, we recognize a number of libraries visited by Cendrars and probably not otherwise known to Apollinaire, notably the New York Public and Saint Petersburg, and so Cendrars's claim to being the *errant* is probably justified for the most part. Apollinaire has the *errant* report the burning of de Gourmont's *Physique de l'amour* at Oxford; only details vary between the versions of «Paris, Port-de-Mer» and «Les Quais et les bibliothèques.» Further, there is always the possibility that Cendrars wrote or supplied information for this «anecdote,» which, like the other chapters of *Le Flâneur*, appeared in Apolli-

naire's column for the *Mercure de France* (this one is dated February 16, 1913). However, one very different emphasis is that Apollinaire's *errant* is to be found only inside libraries, whereas the author, let us say Apollinaire, prefers the river's edge. Still, it is not difficult to think of «Paris, Port-de-Mer» as a continuation and elaboration of the last lines of «Les Quais et les bibliothèques»:

... quand je passe devant les boîtes des bouquinistes près de l'Institut j'évoque la silhouette . . . de Remy de Gourmont, qui ne manquait jamais avant la tombée de la nuit d'aller faire son tour le long des quais.

N'est-ce point la plus délicieuse promenade qui se puisse faire à Paris? Ce n'est pas trop, lorsqu'on a le temps, de consacrer un après-midi à aller de la gare d'Orsay au pont Saint-Michel. Et sans doute n'est-il pas de plus belle promenade au monde, ni de plus agréable.

(Paris: Gallimard, 1928, p. 80)

15. La vie n'est pas la logique, l'art du portrait la perspective, la création de l'écrivain la ressemblance.[ . . . ] Nous ne connaissons jamais d'autres traces de vie --vie de la planète, vie de l'individu-- que ce qui monte à la conscience sous traces d'écriture. Des pattes de mouche.

This is the text of the original edition and the *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 283. The Folio text, pp. 423-4, has added two commas, one after «portrait» and one after «l'écrivain».

16. «Je ne souffle mot» (p. 499 and end).

17. «Je ne compte pour rien. Mes livres non plus,» «je ne compte pour rien, je suis un passe-partout, un *calender*, comme disait Gobineau» (pp. 410, 439).

18. However «trace» here is not quite what Derrida has in mind. In this text, which I consider ultimately mimetic, «trace» refers to what is left of the real in the sign, of the signified in the signifier. In Derrida, as I understand him, «trace» is the track of all signs left in each sign, since that sign exists only by pointing out its difference. Still the analogy is fairly close, and attractive. Here physical books have in their turn become the traces, rather than only containing them. Beyond that, the addicted readers are, each, a trace Cendrars leaves behind. The elusiveness of Cendrars's voice, or text, its insistence upon only making some sense by moving away from any single, well-defined sense makes it comparable to «la *différance*» in action; as Derrida has it: «la *différance* est le mouvement 'producteur' des différences . . .» ('La 'Différance',» *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*, vol. 63, 1968, p. 104). This text is to books and obsessed readers as «*différance*» is to differences. Cendrars's «*différance*» would be the mapping I have described, which deconstructs libraries, particularly as this mapping takes place without a map, but strictly with words which, since they represent a supplement to libraries

and encyclopedias, must deny their claim to plenitude, Cendrars and his text wander, always away from the neater, predictable organizing of the discourse, as Derrida says he must wander from philosophical and empirical method to get at his «*différance*»: «...il y a une certaine errance dans le tracement de la *différance* . . . » (Derrida, p. 79).